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E S S A Y

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECT:

"VOLUNTARY NEGLECT OF ANY ONE DUTY CANNOT BE COMPENSATED BY STRICTNESS OF ATTENTION TO OTHER DUTIES."

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AN ESSAY

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FOLLOWING SUBJECT;

" VOLUNTARY NEGLECT OF ANY ONE DUTY CANNOT
" BE COMPENSATED BY STRICTNESS OF ATTENTION
" TO OTHER DUTIES."

THERE are two methods, by which the will of God is collected. The one, by conſulting his Holy Word; the other, by contemplating the moral diſpoſitions which may be inferred from his Works. The former is an infallible guide to thoſe who have acceſs to it: The latter, though attended with leſs certainty, and enforced by inferior ſanctions, leads to the ſame concluſions, and preſcribes the ſame laws.

The light of Nature, when alone, is weak and imperfect. It is obſcured by paſſion, prejudice, and error. It is only by the aid of Revelation that it can penetrate this gloom, and diſcover

the path of duty. But, although ſubordinate to Revelation, it is by no means ſuperſeded by it, even in a chriſtian country. It imparts, while it borrows, ſtrength. It beautifies and illuſtrates that luminary, from which it derives its own ſplendour. Each has its diſtinct province: But it is in conjunction only that they attract with ſuperior force, and ſhine with collected brightneſs.

Theſe remarks ſuggeſt the proper method of diſcuſſing the propoſition, which is the ſubject of the preſent Eſſay. It will receive proof from God's expreſs declarations in his Word: It will admit illuſtration from the Analogy of his Government: And, from both united, it will be eſtabliſhed on a foundation too broad, and too ſecure, to be ſhaken by any arts of ſophiſtry.

By an appointment which we cannot alter, the expediency, or the wiſdom of which it is preſumption to queſtion, the happineſs of men depends much on the conduct of each other: And the regulation of their actions, in order to make them conducive to the public good, and, of courſe, conformable to the will of God, is the joint ſubject of Legiſlation, Morality, and Religion.

The leading Duties of mankind are guarded, in ſome degree, by human laws: But theſe laws ceaſe to operate, whenever the duty becomes incapable of preciſe definition. Of courſe, all the duties of imperfect obligation, which are interwoven with almoſt every circumſtance of buſineſs or amuſement, which occur in almoſt every tranſaction of public and of private life, are left to be ſecured by Religion; which, while it employs the beauty of Virtue, the moral Fitneſs of actions, and the ſenſe of Honour, as ſo many

ſubſidiary

ſubſidiary Motives, appeals to a higher tribunal, and derives its authority from the ſanctions of a future world.

Every law is a reſtraint upon the will: and therefore, when firſt impoſed, is likely to meet with oppoſition from that love of independence, which is natural to the human mind. So long as this impatience of controul remains, there muſt be an eternal ſtruggle between ſelf-love and ſocial good. Although theſe ultimately coincide, their immediate claims are frequently repugnant. The ſolicitations of ſelf-love are preſent and urgent; and therefore would have a manifeſt advantage, when oppoſed to the claims of ſociety, were they not counteracted by the ſalutary proviſions of law. Legal reſtraints are indeed ſo many encroachments on perſonal liberty; but they confer real advantages, while they abridge only the power of doing injury. They check the exceſſes of paſſion; but they procure the bleſſings of public order, and perſonal ſecurity.

Religion impoſes the ſame laws on the temper and diſpoſition, which civil regulations impoſe on outward actions. And, as the perfection of civil liberty conſiſts in immunity from all reſtraints, but thoſe which are beneficial to ſociety: So, it is the glory of Religion to exempt her followers from all reſtraints, but ſuch as promote their beſt intereſts. In this ſenſe, her ſervice is perfect freedom. The duties ſhe enjoins are of the moſt beneficial tendency: They invigorate and chear the mind: They inſpire a conſciouſneſs of the approbation of the Deity: And, while they encourage an expectation of future reward, they are uniformly connected with preſent happineſs.

Duty

Duty conſiſts in a prompt obedience to the will of God; in a diſpoſition to follow wherever He leads; to love what He loves, and to hate what He hates. It implies, not barely a reſignation to his appointments, and an acquieſcence in his wiſdom; but alſo a chearfulneſs, an alacrity, a zeal in his ſervice. It excludes every motive, but the love of God, and every end, but the happineſs of man. It is a principle, uniform and ſteady in its operation. It is directed equally againſt every ſin, without diſtinction or exception: It admits no heſitation, no palliatives, no reſervations: It abhors every ſpecies of prevarication, hypocriſy, and guile; and condemns whatever bears the impreſſion, or even the ſemblance, of evil. It acknowledges no works of ſupererogation: It admits no claim of redundant virtue. It requires the joint ſervices of the mind and the body; and it conſiders thoſe actions only as virtuous, which ſpring from ſincerity of intention, and from the conſciouſneſs of univerſal and unqualified obligation.

From the very nature then and eſſence of duty, it is clear, that the voluntary neglect of any one command cannot be compenſated by ſtrictneſs of attention to others; becauſe it betrays a want of that ſincerity, without which there can be no moral principle.

The bulk of mankind regard moral duties, as they regard the heavens. Their imaginations are impreſſed with a diſtinct conception of the ſun and moon, and with ſome, though confuſed, and inadequate, idea of the ſtars. Thoſe who have opportunities and capacities for reflection, proceed to arrange into conſtellations, and to compute the number, magnitude, and laws of theſe glorious bodies, which embelliſh, while they ſeem to crowd, the firmament; until, at length,

length, the imagination is aſtoniſhed at the boundleſs expanſe, and retires into an awful, but diſtant, contemplation of the Majeſty of God. In the ſame manner, the leading duties of Religion and Morality obtrude themſelves on the public eye: The ſentiments of piety and juſtice become aſſociated with the ideas of God and of Society. But it requires ſome degree of ſagacity to inveſtigate the extent, to diſtinguiſh the quality, and to aſcertain the importance, of thoſe minuter duties, which reſult from the endleſs diverſity of Character, Situation, and Purſuit.

Wide as the extent of duty is, and comprehenſive as are its precepts, it ſeems impoſſible to guard it from the inroads of vice. The moſt active vigilance, and the moſt cautious circumſpection, are proved, by experience, inſufficient to ſecure a life of innocence: So that there is a boundleſs diſtance between the perfection of ſpeculative virtue, and the actual attainments of her votaries. Even the beauties of human nature are ſullied, if not concealed, by imperfections: Yet virtue is amiable under every diſguiſe. She is contemplated with pleaſure wherever ſhe is to be found. But the mind of man, too active and excurſive to be confined to any living example, overleaps the bounds of finite exiſtence, and dwells, with reverential complacency, on that Beauty of Holineſs which forms the characteriſtic of Deity.

The violation of duty is deſcribed, in the Holy Scriptures, under the general terms of Iniquity, Tranſgreſſion, and Sin. But, leſt all offences againſt the divine law ſhould be deemed of equal turpitude, they are diſtinguiſhed into claſſes, and the guilt of each claſs is denoted by its peculiar diſcrimination. Actions are coloured by their motives:

motives: They have their ſource in the mind: And, according as they proceed from the imbecility of the underſtanding, the tumult of the affections, or the perverſion of the will, they are denominated ſins of Ignorance, of Infirmity, or of Preſumption.

The human underſtanding, at beſt, is circumſcribed within narrow limits. In the hour of cool deliberation, it is liable to be deluded and confounded: It is eaſily warped by paſſion and temptation, by education and cuſtom; and is often engaged in the defence of error, without being conſcious of the ſlighteſt deflection from truth. Its defects are manifeſt in the various purſuits of life, the plans of happineſs, the ſchemes of policy, and moſt of all, in the ſyſtems of religion. Herein human wiſdom has been completely degraded; and the ſame intellect, which was applied with ſucceſs in exploring the laws of the univerſe, has waſted its efforts, and exhauſted its powers, in diſcovering the firſt principles of religion: As if on purpoſe to mortify the pride of man, and to bend his reluctant ſpirit to the teaching of the Spirit of God.

Ignorance will never be imputed as a ſin, when it is owing to the narrowneſs of the underſtanding, or to the unavoidable want of information. So far as theſe are its cauſes, they are alſo its apology. But, unhappily for mankind, ignorance is too often the reſult of negligence and indolence, of obſtinacy and perverſeneſs, of the avocations of pleaſure rather than of buſineſs; and it becomes criminal, in proportion as theſe ingredients enter into its compoſition.

The loweſt degree of religious knowledge, which can poſſibly deſerve that name, conſiſts in an acquaintance with ſuch of the divine laws,

laws, as have a ſettled and definite meaning. In the early periods of ſociety, the rules of life were ſimple and obvious: Such as were ſuggeſted by the convenience of property, and the neceſſity of ſelf-preſervation. It was not till after the advancement of ſociety to ſome degree of refinement, that the range of morality extended beyond that of the municipal laws, and comprehended the remote, but collateral, branches of ſocial duty. It is no wonder therefore, that the injunctions of Moſes were few, and, like the offices of the Levitical Prieſthood, defined with preciſion. Yet they not only admitted the poſſibility of Ignorance, but even preſcribed the mode of its expiation. The caſes are ſeverally ſuppoſed, of the ruler and the peaſant, the individual and the congregation, being ignorant of ſome indiſpenſible duty: And the remedy was ſpecified: The prieſt made an atonement, and the ſin was forgiven. (a)

The next ſort of ignorance, diſtinguiſhed in the ſacred writings, is that which ariſes from incorrect information, reſpecting the nature and attributes of God. How diſtinctly ſoever the divine perfections were ſtamped on the creation, they could be read only by the wiſe and the enlightened. They made but tranſient impreſſions on the vulgar; and were eaſily effaced by the fictions of the poet, the inſtitutions of the legiſlator, and the indifference or the flexibility of the philoſopher. Hence the Deity was conceived to be of a determinate ſhape and figure: He was made acceſſible, not only to the imagination, but even to the ſenſes. He became familiar by devices in gold and ſilver; and was worſhipped through the medium of an Idol. But, as theſe miſtakes were caſual, rather than voluntary, in

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(a) *Leviticus* iv. *throughout.* v. 15. *Numbers* xv. 24, 27, 28, 29. *Hebrews* v. 2.

the bulk of the people; as they proceeded more from education and habit, than from wilful inattention; it is expreſsly declared, that "the times of this ignorance God winked at."(b)

Ignorance aſſumes a terrific aſpect, when armed with power, and connected with religious zeal. It has harraſſed mankind in all ages, for opinions which it was ſometimes their duty, ſometimes their misfortune, and but ſeldom their fault, to adopt. But its guilt is not always proportionable to its effects. It may be directed by proper motives. In ſome caſes it may be involuntary.* When founded in honeſt conviction, it repels the imputation of blame: When actuated by the deſire of vindicating the honour of God, and promoting the happineſs of man, it is laudable in the intention, though pernicious in the effect.

When the miſtaken Miſſionary compels the nations to adopt his creed, or the Bigot extirpates the enemies of the Lord; he believes, like ſome among Jews who maſſacred their Saviour, and like St. Paul who perſecuted the infant church, that he is performing a ſervice acceptable to God: And it may be charitably hoped, that He alſo may obtain mercy, becauſe he does it "ignorantly in unbelief"(c).

The unbelief, here imputed to St. Paul, was accompanied with ſincerity of intention. It proceeded from national prejudice; from a perſuaſion that the Jewiſh ordinances were eſtabliſhed on a firm and permanent foundation. His zeal too, though miſtaken, was kindled by the integrity and rectitude of his conſcience; and, had it

(b) *Acts* xvii. 30. * Οποσα δε αγνοια ανθρωποι εξαμαρτανεσι, παντα ακεσια ταυτ' εγωγε νομιζω. *Xenophon Cyrop.* γ. 3. (c) 1 *Tim.* i. 13.

it not been inflamed by the concurrent oppoſition of the prieſts and elders, it might have been harmleſs at leaſt, if not uſeful; nay, it might have given luſtre to that religion which it laboured to deſtroy. And, had the zeal of later ages been enlightened by knowledge, and tempered with diſcretion; had it been unmixed with ambition or intereſt; had it diſclaimed every end but the glory of God, and every motive but the propagation of truth; it would have adorned that Faith which it has diſhonoured; and, inſtead of injuring, would have promoted, the moſt important intereſts of mankind.

Sins of voluntary ignorance are neglects of duty in the ſtricteſt ſenſe. Their guilt conſiſts, as we have ſeen, in wilfully neglecting to acquire ſuch neceſſary information, as may be obtained by common induſtry; and is neither extenuated, nor excuſed, by a connection with virtues. This connection, indeed renders the guilt more intricate: It involves it with qualities of a different complexion: But the nature of the component parts remains unaltered: Ignorance is ſtill diſtinguiſhed by its proper malignity. It is forgiven indeed, not on account of the remaining virtues of the ſinner, but through the meritorious ſacrifice of the Redeemer.

The ſecond and moſt numerous claſs comprizes the ſins of infirmity; and is the more comprehenſive, as it includes, not only the the exterior acts, but alſo the latent principles, of ſin. Whoever conſiders the frailty of man, the temptations, the treachery and the dangers he has to encounter, from without and from within, will not wonder that he is often betrayed into actions, which, in the tranquility of retirement, and the ſeaſon of recollection, he cannot but diſapprove. The cravings of appetite, the impulſe of paſſion,

and the propenſities of nature, often ſurpriſe him unprepared. He does not always reduce to practice, what he admits in ſpeculation, that temptation is beſt overcome by retreat: And, although, in the general tenor of his conduct, he can forego, with Moſes, the ſplendor of a court; or, like Joſeph, can reſiſt the ſolicitations of beauty, and the blandiſhments of criminal pleaſure; he may, nevertheleſs, in an unguarded moment, violate the dictates of reaſon and diſcretion. The general ſins of men of upright intention are of this claſs. And, although we are not authoriſed to ſay, even of theſe, that they can be compenſated by ſtrictneſs of attention to other duties; yet we hope they will be forgiven, through the interceſſion of that gracious Redeemer, who knows whereof we are made, who conſiders that we are but duſt, and who will not be extreme to mark what is done amiſs.

Of a deeper dye, and more malignant aſpect, are thoſe voluntary offences, which have obtained the name of preſumption. They are ſuch as are committed with the full conſent and approbation of the will: Wherein reaſon joins with temptation, and becomes the handmaid to licentiouſneſs: Wherein, in deſpite of conviction, and the checks of conſcience, with a full view of the extent, and the heinouſneſs, of his crime, the ſinner ruſhes forward, regardleſs of conſequences, with fixed reſolution and cool deliberation.

Againſt theſe ſins, the diſpleaſure of God is ſolemnly denounced. They are enumerated in ſcripture, as ſeverally excluding from happineſs. It is not merely a concatenation of vices, but any one ſingly, which will render the ſinner an outcaſt from heaven. Neither the thief nor the reviler, the drunkard nor the extortioner, will find admiſſion

miſſion there. "No whoremonger, nor unclean perſon, nor covetous man, which is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Chriſt"(d). And as, in the Old Teſtament, he was declared accurſed, who continued not in the exact obſervance of the law (e); ſo, in the New, he who offends in one point is adjudged to be guilty of all (f).

On the other hand, it is not any one duty ſingly which conſtitutes the Chriſtian: It is the union of them jointly and collectively. The perfection of his character compriſes whatſoever is honeſt, lovely, or pure; whatſoever partakes of the nature of virtue, or challenges the approbation of mankind (g). And leſt attainments, which approach ſo near to perfection, ſhould be imagined adequate to the compenſation of any voluntary neglect, they are eſteemed the labours of unprofitable ſervants(h); and their reward is conferred, not as the claim of deſert, but as the emanation of gratuitous favour.

Such are the deciſions of Revelation; and they receive illuſtration and force from the viſible conſtitution of Nature. In a ſtate of health, the human body is alert and vigorous. Every ſenſe, while it receives an impreſſion; every organ, while it performs its function; every limb, while it executes the purpoſe of the mind, adminiſters to the general happineſs. But, let diſeaſe ſuſpend a ſingle faculty, the ſpring of pleaſure ſeems at once exhauſted, and its accuſtomed channels ceaſe to flow. The hebetude of one ſenſe affects the reſt with ſympathetic dulneſs: The pain of one limb is ſucceeded by an univerſal torpor; and, if but one organ be impaired, all the others ſuffer with it.

Virtue

(d) *Epheſians*, v. 5. (e) *Deuteron.* xxvii. 26. *Galatians* iii. 10. (f) *James* ii. 10. (g) *Philippians*, iv. 8. (h) *Luke* xvii. 10.

Virtue is the health of the mind. It harmonizes its powers, and eſtabliſhes its tranquility. Under its influence, every benevolent affection, every ſocial exertion, every exerciſe of devotion, expands and exhilarates the ſoul. In a word, it ſecures the approbation of conſcience, the applauſe of men, and the protection of heaven. But, although this rectitude of conduct has a neceſſary tendency to fill the mind with exultation, in the conſciouſneſs of its integrity; no ſooner is any one faculty diſtempered with vice, than the flavour of life is loſt, the bloom of chearfulneſs diſappears, the whole mind ſeems infected with the deadly contagion, and its nobleſt enjoyments are embittered with remorſe.

The perfection of the body politic conſiſts in the judicious diſtribution of office, and the impartial adminiſtration of law. When theſe are duly regulated, we look for peaceful ſubordination, and the undiſturbed enjoyment of life, liberty, and property. But the machine of government is eaſily deranged. The encroachments of the prince, or of the ſubject, equally provoke oppoſition. In the firſt inſtance of forcible interference, the public tranquility is interrupted; and the bleſſings of ſociety are at once exchanged, for the contentions of faction, or the tumults of anarchy.

The human mind is an epitome of polical government. It contains the rudiments of legiſlative and executive power. It confers protection, while it exacts ſubmiſſion. Reaſon is employed in contriving ſalutary laws, and Conſcience in enforcing them. Under their joint authority, the appetites and paſſions are reduced to order. Each knows its proper ſphere, and each receives its full gratification. In this equilibrium conſiſts the perfection of the human conſtitution:

And,

And, if but one affection tranſgreſs its preſcribed limits, it invades the province, and interferes with the claims, of ſome other. It becomes lawleſs and unruly, in proportion to its encreaſing power: It unſettles the adjuſtments, and deſtroys the balance, of the conſtitution: It begins with relaxation of diſcipline, and ends in general confuſion.

It is already clear, from the nature of duty, from the general ſcope of the ſacred writings, from the conſtitution of man, and from the regulations of political ſociety, that vice cannot be compenſated by virtue; that they are eſſentially abhorrent from each other; and ſo radically oppoſite, that they can never be brought to coaleſce. We ſhall further diſcover, from the natural tendency of vice, that this appointment is not arbitrary; that, like every other part of the divine adminiſtration, it is founded in wiſdom and goodneſs; and is calculated, equally, for the honour of his government, and the happineſs of his people.

The violation of any one duty tends to the violation of many others. As all vices proceed from a corruption of moral principle, they are all diſtinguiſhed by a kindred reſemblance and a conſtant aſſociation. Whenever one appears, it is ſoon accompanied by its fellows. The Liar finds it neceſſary to confirm his aſſeveration with an oath: A habit of prophane ſwearing ſmooths the way to perjury; and perjury induces a diſregard to all laws, divine and human. By a ſimilar progreſſion, the profanation of the Sabbath begets a propenſity to idleneſs: Idleneſs is an incentive to intemperance and impurity; and the violation of ſobriety and chaſtity is attended with ſuch a habit of expence, and ſuch a connection with bad company, as often terminate in acts of fatal violence.

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The ſame argument will apply, with equal force to the neglect of any known duty. The general terms of virtue and vice may be defined by a negation of their oppoſites.(i) As virtue conſiſts in the abſence of vice, as much as vice in the abſence of virtue; ſo, in the inſtances here adduced, it is indifferent whether we conſider falſehood and ſabbath-breaking as direct violations, or as voluntary omiſſions, of the oppoſite duties. And this remark will be recollected, whenever, for the ſake of perſpicuous argumentation, it is found convenient, in the preſent eſſay, to ſubſtitute the *violation*, for the *neglect*, of duty. An inſtance however of the latter kind may be deemed more ſatisfactory; and the following is of ſuch a nature, as will remove every appearance of ambiguity from the concluſion intended to be eſtabliſhed.

The omiſſion of prayer deſtroys the ſenſe of gratitude; baniſhes the reflection that we are dependent creatures; ſubverts the foundation of our reverence, fear, reſignation and love; and thus creates a diſpoſition of mind, little ſhort of confirmed impiety.

The ſame indolence, which neglects to implore the protection of God, will ſeldom labour to conciliate the benevolence of man. It is a common obſervation, that, where no favour is ſolicited, no obligation is acknowledged. And therefore, if an inferior has too much pride, or too much independence, to aſk the bounty which is gratuitouſly beſtowed, he makes no ſuitable return. He feels no grateful emotion; he expreſſes no fidelity of attachment; he teſtifies no warmth of affection. And the attention, which ought to anticipate the

(i) *Virtus eſt vitium fugere, et ſapientia prima*
Stultitia caruiſſe. Hor. Epiſtle 1. 41.

the wiſhes of his benefactor, degenerates into a reluctant, if not an inſolent, ſubmiſſion.

Thus it appears, that the neglect of this one duty of prayer, has a tendency to aboliſh the whole duty, not only which a creature owes to his Creator, but alſo, which a ſervant owes to his Lord.

General rules are neceſſary to every ſpecies of government, divine as well as human. Without them, no ſyſtem of conduct can be ſelected; No action can obtain a preference over another: Virtue would often loſe its reward; and Vice would be ſecure in the hope of impunity. Whatever therefore is expedient, muſt be univerſally enjoined: Whatever is pernicious, muſt be as univerſally forbidden. The voluntary neglect of any one duty is the violation of a general law; and its guilt is to be meaſured by its remote, as well as by its immediate, conſequences. It is to be eſtimated, not ſo much by the miſchief of the crime, in any detached inſtance, as by the evil which would enſue, if it were committed by all perſons, in the ſame circumſtances. Experience has convinced the civil magiſtrate, that this is not merely a ſpeculative truth. He has long underſtood, that the toleration of fraud, in one inſtance, muſt lead to the licence of general peculation; and that a private loſs, if not diſcountenanced, muſt be followed by a general inſecurity of property. In the ſame manner, he is aware, that if murder be allowed in one caſe, it muſt be allowed in another: That, although the firſt offence occaſions the loſs of but one member of ſociety, it cauſes, if unpuniſhed, a general inſecurity of life, and endangers the exiſtence of ſociety itſelf. Therefore, he not only frames general laws, but alſo is ſteady in the execution of them; conſcious that every departure from an eſtabliſhed

rule unſettles its ſtability. He eſteems not a whole life of honeſty a compenſation for one fraudulent artifice. He ſuffers neither the diſtinctions of birth, the influence of wealth, the ſuperiority of talents, nor unſullied integrity of morals, antecedent to the crime, nor all theſe united, to ſcreen the aſſaſſin from public juſtice.

As human governments are founded in utility, they are ratified by the unequivocal ſanction of the Deity: And the nearer they approach to perfection, the more, it is preſumed, they will coincide with that plan, which the wiſdom of Providence will hereafter purſue. The prevention of crimes is their common end: The infliction of puniſhment their common mean. This mean, though itſelf an evil, is founded in neceſſity. It is the only one which can influence the conduct, or controul the will, of man. It is that alone which gives energy to every ſyſtem of juriſprudence; and it pervades, and ſupports, univerſally, the viſible government of God.

Every neglect of prudence is puniſhed, in the common courſe of Providence, with embarraſſment; every deviation from temperance with diſeaſe; every departure from honeſty with remorſe. And we are aſſured, by the concurrent teſtimony of Reaſon and of Revelation, that puniſhment will remain the inſtrument of juſtice, when the moral government, already begun, ſhall overcome its preſent obſtructions, and receive its final completion.

Let not the inference from this analogy be evaded, by ſaying that the end, and the meaſure, of human puniſhments are eſſentially different from thoſe of the divine. It is acknowledged, that the deſign of penal laws is to ſecure the peace, rather than the virtue, of the

the community: That expediency, not morality, is their object: That the puniſhment is encreaſed, in proportion to the frequency and the miſchief, rather than the turpitude, of the crime; and even that, in ſome caſes, for reaſons of ſtate, the leſſer obligation muſt be guarded by the ſeverer penalty.

The truth is, that, in civil inſtitutions, it cannot be otherwiſe. The moral quality of an action cannot eaſily be aſcertained. It depends, chiefly, on the intent and purpoſe of the mind; and theſe can ſeldom be diſcerned by human wiſdom. They demand attentive obſervation and familiar intercourſe: And, if theſe are wanting, are, at beſt, inferred only from lax and doubtful circumſtances. Even a parent or a guardian may be deceived by an action in diſguiſe. As far indeed as they can both aſſign its motives, and compute its effects, ſo far they can determine its quality. On this account, they may be eſteemed the repreſentatives of God. Their government, like his, is ſtrictly moral: Like him, they puniſh for ſins, as well as for crimes; and the end of their diſcipline, like his, is, to correct improper habits, to inſtil uſeful principles, to regulate the paſſions, and to reform the heart.

And, in order to prove that civil puniſhments are regulated by moral turpitude, as far as poſſible; it will be ſufficient to conſider the execution, as diſtinct from the ſanction, of the laws; and it will appear, at leaſt in this country, that, unleſs where exceptions to the rules of diſtributive juſtice cannot with ſafety be admitted, though all are condemned alike, who are guilty of the ſame crime, thoſe only are ſelected, as proper objects of puniſhment, whoſe offences are diſtinguiſhed by peculiar aggravations; and whoſe

conduct is marked with ſuch a want of principle, and ſuch profligacy of manners as betray the hardened and accompliſhed villain.

It ſeems to be the wiſdom of free ſtates, to be ſevere in the formation, but to relax in the execution, of the laws. The wiſeſt plans of legiſlation have, however, their defects: The beſt modes of civil polity often loſe their end. The hiſtory of mankind has evinced, that crimes have encreaſed with the extent of duty; and that the growing ſenſe of obligation has enlarged both the number, and the ſeverity, of penal laws. This evil has its origin in the evaſion of juſtice. The expence of proſecution, the uncertainty of evidence, the negligence of the police, and, above all, the frequent remiſſion of puniſhment, are ſo many encouragements, and incentives, to villainy. They ſeduce the attention of the malefactor, from the ignominy of puniſhment, to the probability of eſcape. They delude him with the chance of ſecrecy, or harden him by the example of pardon: Until he is prepared for new depredations, or becomes expert at his former crimes.

But this evil is confined to human inſtitutions. The offender cannot hope to elude the vigilance of a Governor, whoſe eye penetrates the thickeſt veil, whoſe wiſdom ſcrutinizes the intentions of the heart, and whoſe juſtice is not biaſſed by miſtaken lenity.

Temptation and opportunity are the cauſes of ſin. They are ſeparately powerful: Together they often ſtifle all reflection on future conſequences; and, when joined with the hope of impunity, they form a triple engine, ſtrong enough to beat down every barrier, in a mind not previouſly fortified by religion.

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In order to preclude the expectation of impunity, the Governor of the univerſe is pleaſed to proceed by equal and impartial laws. For every voluntary omiſſion, or violation, of duty, he has provided a penalty proportioned to the offence. And, if the ſinner, notwithſtanding repeated warnings, explicit declarations, and unqualified threatenings, obſtinately perſiſt in his iniquity, he muſt be abandoned to a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation."(k)

Theſe remarks will receive abundant confirmation from the following facts; which at once afford ſtanding admonitions of the danger of ſin, and awful memorials of the juſtice of God.

The Jews perſiſted in rejecting the Meſſiah. They refuſed to examine his pretenſions: They neglected the evidences of his miſſion. They were compelled, indeed, to admit the reality of his miracles, but they reſiſted their deſign. They could not deny the facts: Theſe were too public, to admit the charge of impoſture; too undiſguiſed, to be ſuſpected of colluſion; and too ſtupendous, to be attributed to human power: But they evaded the concluſion, intended to be eſtabliſhed by them, by aſcribing them to the agency of Satan. For this obſtinate perverſeneſs, they were judicially doomed to a puniſhment, not leſs dreadful in its immediate operation, than humiliating in its diſtant conſequences:—Which involved the deſtruction of their city, the contempt of their religion, and the diſperſion, and captivity, of their nation:—A puniſhment, which was foreſeen and predicted; and which ſtill remains, with unabated ſeverity, after the revolution of eighteen centuries.

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(k) *Hebrews* x. 27.

The divine juſtice was accompanied with circumſtances no leſs terrible, in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrha; the univerſal ravages of the deluge; the excluſion of our firſt parents from Paradiſe; and the expulſion of the apoſtate angels from heaven.

From theſe examples, and eſpecially from the two laſt, the concluſion is unanſwerably certain, that the divine veracity is not pledged in vain: That the habitual neglect of one duty will not finally remain unpuniſhed: What is more, that the penalty, incurred by one voluntary omiſſion, will not be mitigated, much leſs remitted, by ſtrictneſs of attention to other commands.

Let not theſe obſervations, on the Juſtice of God, be underſtood to exclude his Mercy. He has aſſerted both theſe attributes, in the courſe of his Providence, and in his holy Word. In the former, his mercies are gratuitouſly beſtowed: In the latter, they are diſpenſed by general rules, on preſcribed and ſtipulated conditions. What conditions will be accepted, muſt depend ſolely on the appointment of God. He alone knows the exigencies of his government. He has been pleaſed to require "Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord Jeſus Chriſt (1):" And it is a proof of his goodneſs, if he allows, on any terms, the laws of juſtice to be ſuſpended. That this ſuſpenſion will not be cauſed by ſtrictneſs of attention to other duties, is further confirmed by the following conſideration; that the miſery, which is the natural conſequence of vice, can neither be averted, nor delayed, by any exertions whatever of the ſufferer himſelf. If a premature death, the remote effect of intemperance, be

(1) *Acts* xx. 21.

be prevented; it is owing, not to the repentance of the dying man, but to ſome friendly interpoſition; to the care of the phyſician, or the vigilance of the nurſe. So, if mercy be ſhewn to a penitent ſinner, it is not on account of his repentance; it is not for the merit of his other virtues; or for any compenſation that can be made by himſelf; but through the interpoſition of another.

It is not neceſſary, perhaps not poſſible, to explain in what manner vicarious ſufferings can expiate guilt. It is ſufficient to be aſſured, that they are a mean of God's appointment. Had He been pleaſed to accept of ſome duties, as a compenſation for the neglect of others; (ſuppoſing this could poſſibly conſiſt with the ends of his government;) it would become us to acquieſce in his offer with thankfulneſs. But we have endeavoured to ſhew, that there is no reaſon to expect that he will; that there are many reaſons to be aſſured that he will not: And we ought to eſteem it a proof of his condeſcenſion, that he is willing to extend his mercy, on his own terms, through a Mediator (m).

Admit, if poſſible, for the ſake of argument, the doctrine here rejected: And we ſhall ſee what innovations muſt be made in the moral government of God. It is evident, from the nature of the ſuppoſition, that the duty, permitted to be ſacrificed, cannot be fixed and determinate. It muſt depend on opinion. It muſt be regulated by conſtitution and habit. It muſt be varied by thoſe indefinite, and nameleſs, circumſtances, which diſcriminate the characters of men. It muſt aſſume a new form, according to the predominancy of thoſe turbulent paſſions, which, in

(m) 1 *John*, ii. 12.

in turn, gain poſſeſſion of the mind; and muſt yield, alternately, to the impulſe of avarice, ambition, and reſentment. Thus there would be an influx of every kind of immorality. The moſt profligate licentiouſneſs would not only be tolerated, but even ſanctified; and the purity of Chriſtian virtue would be exchanged for the exploded inſtitutions of polytheiſm; wherein every vice was honoured with a celeſtial patron, and every obligation was neglected with impunity. A conſequence, too abſurd to juſtify, for a moment, the aſſumption of the premiſes.

In order to prevent theſe dangerous inroads, the divine lawgiver has placed his authority, as a fence, about his commands. He has connected them all together by this common bond of union. He has ſtamped on each the impreſſion of his Sovereignty. Whoever, therefore, reſiſts his authority, in one inſtance, virtually diſowns it in all. He who is not withheld from theft, by a principle of conſcience, cannot, by any ſenſe of duty, be reſtrained from violence, perjury, and murder. St. James was aware of the neceſſity of fixing this boundary, in order to check the firſt intruſion of ſin. "He that ſaid, do not commit adultery, ſaid alſo, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a tranſgreſſor of the law."(n)

It may be further argued, that, if the voluntary neglect of duty were authorized, in one inſtance, it would gradually ſear the conſcience, and harden the heart. Every improper indulgence is an acceſſion to the ſtrength of appetite. It removes the obſtacles to a repetition of the ſame indulgence, and inſenſibly forms a habit. Its influence

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(n) *James* ii. 11.